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Theory as Fantasy: Emotional Dimensions to Grounded Theory

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Abstract

In this paper, we discuss emotions and fantasies that inform and influence the project of theory building. Our argument is that theory building can be improved by engaging directly with emotions and, in particular, with fantasies that are defensively and creatively generated by the researcher. Once acknowledged, these can be transformed into hunches, ideas and insights. We provide an example of the emotional dynamics surrounding a novice researcher's use of grounded theory within her doctoral research. We highlight three distinctive researcher fantasies of containment, coherence and purity associated with her experience of the method. We discuss how engagement with these fantasies deepened the researcher's analysis and thereby enhanced the process of building theory from the data. Therefore, our paper contributes to an understanding of how fantasies mobilized by such an open-ended research method can help to refine our thinking about emerging theory.

Keywords

Emotion, grounded theory, fantasy building, theory building, psychodynamics, researcher experience

Introduction

Grounded theory (GT) is a 'discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data' (Martin and Turner, 1986: 141). The GT researcher aims to experience the problem or issue from the perspective of the research respondents and to develop an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses about what is going on. Much has been written about the best way to do grounded theory (Corley, 2015; Gummeson, 2011; Walsh et al., 2015) but we know little about how GT researchers, and particularly the novice researcher, might connect with the emotional and unconscious processes stimulated by working with and through this method.

Any attempt to experience the problem or issue from the perspective of respondents involves the person of the researcher, which necessarily includes the emotional experience (and emotions resulting from inexperience) that he or she brings to the application of the method. Our argument is that it is important to reveal emotions and fantasies that are defensively and creatively generated by the researcher, so that they can be transformed, once acknowledged, into ideas and insights. We provide an example of the emotional dynamics surrounding a novice researcher's use of GT within her doctoral research. We argue that working with the emotional and unconscious dynamics of GT, and with researcher fantasies of *containment*, *coherence* and *purity* associated with the method, deepened the researcher's analysis and thereby enhanced theory building.

Existing scholarship on the emotional aspects of research assume that researchers know what they are feeling when they are feeling it (Harlos et al., 2003; Saunders et al., 2015). Our work focusses on unconscious emotional dynamics which manifest as fantasy and as defenses against emotion. We demonstrate the creative ways in which unconscious emotion can be made available for consideration by the researcher. We adopt a psychodynamic approach to grounded research. What is novel about this approach is that it invites researchers to delve into the internal and imagined world of the researcher and the researched, as an integral and important part of research design, data collection and analysis. It involves an interest in: unconscious dynamics at work for the researcher and the researched; unconscious processes within the supervisory pair/ triad; fantasies mobilised within and around the research; and broader dynamics of relations in the context of the research environment.

Our methodological contribution in this paper stems from our creation of a framework through which to understand how emotional, and particularly unconscious aspects of research, are enacted through fantasy building. There are two elements of this that constitute a novel contribution. First, we argue for the importance of working overtly with and through unconscious defenses that function to exclude unwanted emotions from awareness. Therefore, we are not only seeking to identify emotions that are part of the data, that arise in the role of the researcher, and that influence inductive and abductive analysis. We are also capturing data on the unconscious processes mobilised by researchers as their research unfolds, and the unconscious dynamics created between researchers and others (e.g. respondents, research supervisors, co-researchers) as they interact. This allows us to delve deeply into the imagined domains generated by doing grounded research on emotions. We see this as especially helpful in broadening and augmenting the 'imaginative interpretations' (Charmaz, 2008: 157) that are central to grounded analysis.

Second, unconscious defenses become visible in the fantasies researchers can create to defend against unwanted emotion mobilised by doing research. Although fantasies can represent defenses against emotion, accessing them also provides opportunities for creative insights that support imaginative interpretation. We argue that the fantasy work of the researcher is an important element in the process of analysis through which general assertions emerge that provide a basis for theory building. In this paper, we highlight three unconscious fantasies that arose for a novice GT researcher, and demonstrate the ways in which they affected the work of the researcher and the GT method. These fantasies were identified through 'free association' within supervision, through reflections on the researcher's dreams, and through auto-ethnographic writing

about the lived experience of the research. We found that fantasy could be fed back into the research process to strengthen engagement with theory building.

We are aware that other concepts, such as paradox and ambiguity, can also be used to engage with tensions emerging from the emotional experience of doing research; and to understand how emotions become embedded within research. For example, searching out the 'paradoxical tensions' (Vince and Broussine, 1996: 4) mobilized by doing research helps us to 'taunt our established certainties' as researchers by acknowledging inevitable contradictions (Schad et al., 2016: 5). Similarly, ambiguity alerts us to inconsistencies and discomforts in the research process, often written up as 'limitations' (Wolgemuth, 2015: 522). We argue that a focus on fantasy can help researchers to produce a distinctive understanding of the relationship between emotions mobilized by doing research as well as how emotions become embedded within the researcher's understanding and approach. Psychodynamic thinking helps the researcher resist 'imposing cognitively driven order onto always provisional and uncertain knowledge' (Hollway, 2013:25).

Why Fantasy?

Fantasy occurs continuously in daily life (Freud, 1953). It refers to 'the endless materializations of unconscious life' (Frosh, 2002: 51), to an active unconscious mind that is constantly generating ideas and images through which we see the world. In this paper, fantasy refers to imaginative ideas or stories connected to the researcher's psychic life and to unconscious relations during a period of research. As researchers, part of what we do is to 'take refuge in plausible stories' (Phillips, 2014: 9) and in evocative resonances beneath the level of consciousness (Bollas, 2009). Such resonances become especially important within the conduct of research when the emotional experience of the task threatens to overwhelm the researcher.

Our illustrations come from a single researcher's use of Glaser's version of GT (Glaser, 1998). The first author was using this method, feeling confused by it, learning how to apply it, and becoming aware of her emerging critique of it, all at the same time. Two insights emerged from this experience. First, it led to questioning the assumption that GT unfolds in sequential steps (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) along a research path of systematic guidance towards theory building. As researchers, we are constantly involved in the fantastical pursuit of theory as a container of random experience. Theory represents the fantasy of order emergent from confusion. It creates perspective, introduces coherence and offers interpretation of experiences. It illuminates that which is confusing through the application of our 'disciplined imagination' (Weick, 1989). The coherence that theory offers is imagined as much as it is logically derived from data. We found that articulating a fantasy building process alongside the theory building process transformed the lived experience of using GT into insights that extended the potential for *imaginative interpretations* within our analysis. We recognised that the fantasies mobilized by the emotional experience of doing GT become the basis for resonances that illuminate theory building.

Second, we highlight anxieties generated through the researcher's employment of GT and reflect on the ways in which these anxieties may be applied back into the research to promote insights about the depth and value of this method. Here, anxiety refers to the underlying anticipation that something will go wrong. We do not know if

something bad waits around the corner, but we expect it nonetheless. Such feelings disrupt rational thought and intensify fantasy. Anxiety alerts us to the possible existence of threats, but also (potentially) how to deal with them (Gabriel, 2008). Our narrative of research experience shows how researcher anxieties were managed through the generation of three fantasies (of containment, coherence, and purity). These offered data about how the emotional dynamics of researcher experience and emergent method informed and influenced the project of theory building. These fantasies are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Examples of fantasies that might emerge in Grounded Theory research

Fantasy Building	**Rationalization**	**Example of defensive behaviour**	**Example of unconscious feelings managed**
Fantasy of containment: The anxieties of being a novice	Deploying the GT method correctly will eradicate confusion in the data.	Initial written drafts complied with GT conventions but were 'unreadable'.	Underlying knowledge insecurities, and persistent anxieties about lack of research expertise.
Fantasy of coherence: The anxieties of being overwhelmed	Reliance on the GT method will create order amongst chaotic data.	Intellectual word spinning: 150 labels masquerading as categories.	Strong and potentially overwhelming feelings which unsettled and, at times, undermined the capacity to think.
Fantasy of purity: The anxieties of incompetence	Blaming the GT method will alleviate researcher feelings of shame and incompetence.	Becoming stuck and blaming the methodology.	Insistent feelings of fear, incompetence and shame.

Differences between our perspective and other approaches to researcher emotion

The theme of our paper falls within the broader domain of how emotions are mobilized in the process of doing research. For example, Harlos et al (2003: 313) explain how their emotions intruded on the task of meaning making: '…we were agitated, nervous, and uneasy as we tried to articulate our struggles to make a cursory meaning of the text'. They describe making 'explicit their initial thoughts and feelings about the data' (308). Saunders et al. (2015), invite researchers to 'consider your emotions and how to manage these during this process of being an internal researcher'. They suggest that a researcher needs to learn to 'cope with the degree of *detachment'* (Saunders et al., 2015: 209) to manage feelings of becoming overwhelmed by large amounts of data.

The general advice is to acknowledge one's emotions, to expect their impact on the research project, and to have a coherent strategy for managing potential incoherence. A psychodynamic perspective on emotion additionally acknowledges unconscious *attachment* to emotions that are camouflaged or avoided; that 'it is difficult to conceive of the research relationship without considering transference and counter-transference' (Gabriel, 1999: 276); and that states of mind are both hidden from subjects yet shape their thought and behaviour (Rustin, 2009).

Our *fantasy of coherence* engages with these ideas by highlighting the *hidden ways* in which emotion presents. It may not be possible (or wise) to 'manage' emotion if it presents in unusual and creative ways. Exploring the fantasy of research as a coherent process allows for the unknown, the incoherent and the unexpected to emerge as research insights rather than disruptions.

'Consider your emotions' (Saunders et al, 2015) is important advice for researchers. However, it can be useful to move beyond the assumption that a researcher always knows what she is feeling when she is feeling it. Strategies for managing the anxieties and feelings associated with being a researcher (such as keeping a fieldwork diary) rely on the researcher being conscious of what was felt, what has worked, and what has not. A researcher must not only notice the emotional impact of participation in a research encounter, but also be able to reflect on the raw emotional experience evoked by it (Hollway, 2016).

Our experience was of tension between awareness and ignorance, knowing and not knowing, and the subsequent fear that a novice researcher may not know what she is doing. Our *fantasy of purity* reflects the complexity of emotional experience for the novice researcher; the anxiety of doing things 'the wrong way'. Exploring this fantasy invited questions about whether these tensions and uncertainties can offer insight on the chosen method and the orthodoxy that surrounds its use.

Researchers can become attached to specific methods, and to the idea of 'brand identity' (Pritchard, 2012), that adherence to one methodological choice will 'secure legitimacy and credibility with reviewers and examiners' (Pritchard, 2012: 132). This idea is an acknowledgement of a feeling of connection to a method, of an understanding that ensures it is being used in expected and acceptable ways. Our *fantasy of containment* recognises that it is important to articulate a clear and legitimate methodological choice, but also that the novice researcher can experience this as dependency on the infallibility of her chosen method. Calling such dependency into question encourages the novice researcher to ask about the emotions that are associated with such dependency, as well as how emotional responses contribute to reflexive engagement with the research process.

Grounded Theory: A popular and contested method

Grounded Theory is a popular method that has been used to research a diverse range of topics (O'Callaghan, 2012; Sare and Bales, 2014). The method is widespread in qualitative business and management research (O'Reilly et al., 2012; Partington, 2000). The purpose of a grounded theory study is to experience the problem, issue or meaning from the perspective of the research respondents and to develop an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses about what is going on. GT fits well with a

study aimed at the development of a suggestive theory, where there is no strong theoretical basis from which to develop well-focused research questions. Grounded theorists start their research process with data and develop theories that are generated from their analysis and conceptualization of data, as distinct from logical deduction from a priori assumptions.

However, there are continuing and passionate debates about the way GT is deployed. The uses of GT vary widely across the spectrum of possible application 'from orthodox and classic GT, to GT light… to one calorie-only GT' (Gummeson, 2011: 232). For some researchers, the GT debate has taken on a 'life of its own' (Corley, 2015: 5) with differences in approach and use of the methodology tending 'to blur the overall scope and reach of GT' (Walsh et al., 2015: 2). Complicating matters, but not inconsistent with the debate over the identity of GT, these same variations and adaptations, when viewed from a different perspective, signal assessment of GT as containing the 'hallmarks of a successful methodology' (Corley, 2015: 5).

Researchers must decide which version of GT to follow. This may not be a problem for experienced researchers. For the novice, it provides a background of continuing uncertainty about the correct approach to take, as well as feeding the sense that there is an ideal form of GT that is somewhere to be found. Unconsciously, disagreements that have characterized the method can become an aspect of the lived experience of being a novice GT researcher. GT researchers are encouraged to deploy their theoretical sensitivity: 'the sensitive insight of the observer himself' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 251) to distinguish core categories and relationships from extraneous detours. In practice, theoretical sensitivity is the process by which researchers lived experience is deployed as a lens through which to interrogate data. However, this is where anxieties begin, because it can be difficult for the novice researcher to trust her own judgment.

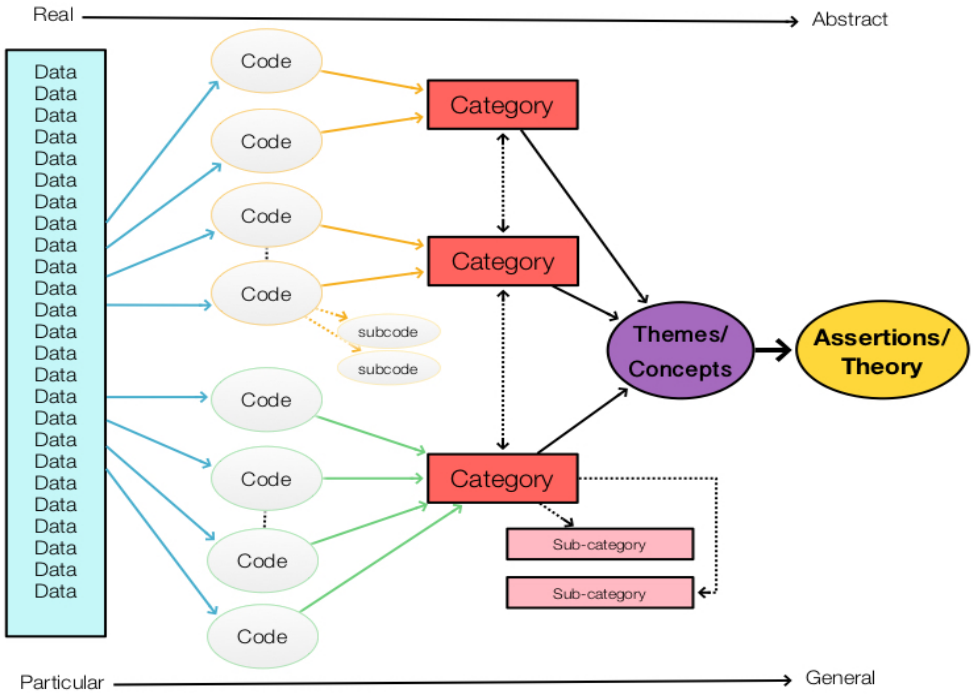
The tension between deploying the method in the correct manner and the invitation to bring personal experience to the analysis of data is *both* an enticing and an anxiety-producing prospect. The contested nature of grounded theory can create uncertainty about the best way to put it into practice, and (as we illustrate in the examples below) this uncertainty is reflected in emotional responses from the researcher. To understand the consequences of the lived experience of the method, we think that it is important to engage with a key question: *how do the emotional dynamics of researcher experience and emergent method inform and influence the project of theory building*? The starting point for answering this question is to consider what is involved in theory building and how emotions and unconscious dynamics (in the form of fantasies about the method) may be integral to this process.

Theory building

Theory advances knowledge through original insights into the connections among phenomena and informs and supports developments in practice. 'A good theory explains, predicts and delights' (Sutton and Staw, 1995: 378). This simple, elegant description captures the intersection between the explanatory power of theory to inform and guide; to be relevant to current and emerging issues; and to excite our interest through the discovery of novel, perhaps counter-intuitive connections. This raises the question of how to build theory to explain, predict and delight?

The way in which GT helps us to do this is by providing the researcher with a systematic, inductive approach for collecting and analysing data to develop theoretical analyses (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). GT starts with an inductive logic but becomes abductive, involving 'intuitive interpretation of empirical observations and creative ideas that might account for them' (Charmaz, 2008: 157). GT therefore requires 'imaginative interpretations' (Charmaz, 2008: 157) as the researcher both reasons *and* imagines possible theoretical accounts in the data to identify the most plausible explanation. This process has become characteristic of much qualitative research. We illustrate this, for example, in Figure 1 (below), from a well-known qualitative research textbook (Saldaña, 2016).

Figure 1. 'A streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry' (from Saldaña, 2016: 14).



This process is presented as a model of 'progress toward the thematic, conceptual and theoretical' and as an 'ideal and streamlined scheme' (Saldaña, 2016: 14). It is a very good general illustration of the process of analysis through different elements of coding and categorization. The model comes with a caveat, to 'keep in mind that the actual act of reaching theory is much more complex than illustrated' (Saldaña, 2016: 14). Our experience as researchers certainly supports this caveat although we also believe that the complexity is as much emotional as it is 'in mind'.

Theory building is future orientated, and management researchers have been invited to develop 'theoretical prescience', to engage with 'incipient organizational, managerial and societal issues and problems' (Corley and Gioia, 2011: 23). Another way to put this is that theory building is about the process of discerning what we need to know by 'making informed projections' (Corley, 2015: 25). In addition, theory building is dynamic not static, it provides highly relevant but also necessarily provisional insights into connections that are likely to evolve and change. Despite the

practical utility of existing models, imaginative interpretation requires more than the systematic identification of codes, categories and assumptions. Our capacity to imagine and interpret is tied to the person of the researcher, as well as to the emotions mobilized by putting the role of researcher into practice. We refer to this additional aspect as 'fantasy building'.

Fantasy Building

The underlying emotional dynamics within a researcher role can involve projections of a different sort. These emerge as an unconscious defensive response to the anxieties generated by the role, through the emotional highs and lows of doing research, and in association with others – including respondents, co-researchers or academic supervisors. In using the term 'fantasy building' we do not mean to imply that the generation of unconscious fantasy is a logical process akin to placing building blocks on top of each other. Fantasy gathers its threads by relying on our psychic and physical limits and capabilities, our consciousness of mental and embodied perception. Knowledge from this perspective begins in 'wishful unconscious desire' (Phillips, 2014: 51). For example, a common doctoral student fear is that someone else will write a PhD in the same area (perhaps even with the same title) before they have finished, thereby undermining their unique contribution to knowledge. This fantasy captures several intersecting anxieties and other mixed feelings generated around the seemingly monumental task of doctoral research and writing.

Various scholars (Armstrong, 2005; Ekman, 2013; Gabriel, 1995; Glynos, 2008; Lapping, 2016) argue for the value of fantasy as a form of individual and systemic intelligence that cannot be accessed by purely 'rational' approaches. These scholars outline not only the operational conception of fantasy but also its importance in theorizing organizational dilemmas that are hidden from view. For example, Eshraghi and Taffler (2012) consider the role of the unconscious in investment decision-making, particularly hedge funds, that touch a potent underlying desire for wealth. They emphasize the role (and dangers) of unconscious fantasy as 'the excitement of investing in what hedge funds represented became divorced from the anxiety associated with the potential consequences of taking excessive investment risk' (Eshraghi and Taffler, 2012: 1245).

The experience of doing research mobilizes complex and contradictory feelings. The researcher is challenged to tolerate paradoxical feelings and (at the same time) to complete the task that prompted the feelings in the first place. Emotional resonances are integral to the research encounter (Prasad, 2014; Ulus, 2015). By paying attention to defenses, to projective processes, to the anxieties of doing research, unconscious emotions can become available for interrogation and interpretation by the researcher (Ogden, 1994). Fantasies that are emergent from anxiety can be recognized as productive research insights, and as potentially creative in their imagining of future possibility.

In our view, theory building and fantasy building are parallel processes, sitting side by side as collaborative and disruptive partners in the process of doing research. The desired outcome of theory building is to make a difference by disconfirming the obvious and challenging existing knowledge, finding gaps and cracks between established frameworks, while also offering an alternative, compelling narrative

(Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013). Our experience of using the grounded theory method to study emotion in organizations is that the unsettled and unsettling environment of theory building is fertile ground for the generation of unconscious fantasy. We are therefore taking a first step in the research documentation of a relationship between theory building and fantasy building.

Research Context and Approach

This section of the paper provides the reader with a first person (first author) description of the research situation from which the present ideas were drawn. The subject of my doctoral research was disappointment within organizations, and how this feeling enters individuals' ways of being and acting in their work lives. The design and theoretical results of this study can be read in a previously published paper (Clancy, Vince and Gabriel, 2012). However, I want to say a little about the core findings, because they emerged concurrently from my analysis of my data and my emotional experience as a researcher. First, I found that feelings of disappointment are processed internally much more than they are given voice. Second, I found that disappointment is strongly associated with anger projected onto others as blame or ambivalence. Third, I found that disappointment is bound up with conflictual feelings of failure (e.g. the tension between acknowledging failure in/of the organization and maintaining positive feelings towards the organization and its goals).

Using these core findings as a basis for theory building, I determined that disappointment is experienced either as failure of self (*I am disappointing*) or as failure of other (*I am disappointed*). I also discovered something counter-intuitive, which is that when disappointment is owned as an ordinary aspect of experience (*I disappoint*) it is transformed. The fantasy of a failed self/ other, once acknowledged, loses its disabling grip, and disappointment can be understood as a core part of relating. Indeed, disappointment can be reframed as tolerable and ordinary rather than an emotion that needs to be hidden, avoided or displaced elsewhere. My experiences of emotional resonances within the research process were fundamental to the emergence of these insights about disappointment.

Methods used to explore the emotional dimensions to grounded theory

As researchers, we are affected by the tension between the theoretical outcomes we are hoping for and the process of their discovery. The study of disappointment mobilized strong emotions and vivid unconscious fantasies for me as a researcher. Along with my academic supervisor (second author) I became interested in how the emotional dynamics of researcher experience were affecting the project of theory building. I reflected (individually and in discussion with my supervisor) on my procrastinations, excuses, missed deadlines and intermittent desire to quit. An entry from my research journal highlights one example:

> *I was due to fly to the UK today to meet (my supervisor). At the last minute, the flight was cancelled by the airline. My emotional response to the cancellation caught me by surprise. I was both thrilled and angered in equal measure. I was prepared for the meeting and had a list of items I wanted to discuss face-to-face. At the same time, I was relieved not to meet because it*

would have meant confronting the part of me that is feeling disappointed in my progress.

Feelings such as failure, anger, blame, incompetence, at first rejected or relegated to the margins of the research, were brought to the fore and examined as elements of the overall data. This aspect of my experience highlighted the complex role of researcher emotion. It became clear that my emotional experience mirrored the emotional experience of research participants who had expressed similar feelings in relation to disappointment at work.

Alongside my grounded theory method, I wanted to capture emotional and unconscious processes at work in my approach to the research. I did this in three interconnected ways: through supervisory sessions focused on *free association*, a process by which the individual speaks without censoring their thoughts; by recording and reflecting on my *dreams* as a form of wish-fulfilment (Freud, 1953); and through *auto-ethnographic engagement* with my lived experience of emotions and unconscious processes within the research.

Drawing on Kvale's (2003) approach, my supervisor and I reframed some of our conversations (10 in total over the period of the research) by applying psychodynamic theory to my emotional experience. We explored researcher/ researched and supervisor/ student relationships as a way of surfacing fantasy, anxiety and unconscious associations. I became aware of the value of impasses, which usually occurred at a moment when I was confronted with the fantasy of how things 'should' be. We tried to notice unconscious thoughts and feelings to bring out the emotional landscape of the research. Supervision sessions that were dedicated to free association encouraged me to articulate my inner monologue about my experience of the research, and to bring this into dialogue. This was not about saying whatever was on my mind, but rather provided an opportunity for me to become immersed in the details of this inner monologue and to link one set of emerging ideas about the research to the next.

I also documented dreams as a way of 'voicing the unspoken' (Finlay, 2002: 531). These were explored in three ways. (1) I recorded and reflected on dreams in my research diary. (2) The dreams were re-explored through the lens of 'disappointment'. This was accomplished by the first author as an individual writing task (3) The dreams were re-explored within academic supervision as relational dynamics between the researcher/ researched and supervisor/ student. An example of a dream fragment documented by the researcher provides an illustration of the type of data gathered:

> *I am waiting for the curtain to rise at the opening night of a theatre production of Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen. (In my waking life, this is one of my favourite novels). A friend who has not previously seen the production accompanies me (she is not familiar with the book). I am full of anticipation and excitement about seeing the play and about sharing the experience. As the curtain rises I realize that the actors are speaking a foreign language. My feeling in the dream is one of shame …I should have known the play was not in English. What will my friend think of me for inviting her to something she cannot possibly understand?*

The dream is a simple story about disappointment – wanting to share something of importance with a close friend and feeling shamed when the experience does not match expectation. This dream mirrored many stories shared by research participants. It also reminded me of a statement made by a research participant in which he said, 'all great literature is about disappointment'. I made an association between established literature (Jane Austen) and prospective literature (a PhD thesis). The inevitability of the relationship between expectation and disappointment pointed the way to strong feelings when something of significance was at stake (an opening night, publication, or Viva Voce examination). The dream also offered insight into an anxiety and subsequent fantasy (coherence). Would I succeed in becoming proficient in a new (academic) language to communicate a story? Would that story gain credible (or damming) reviews on its opening night (the Viva Voce examination)?

My emotions, associations and dreams were developed through auto-ethnographic reflections on my lived experience of the research. 'When researchers write auto-ethnographies, they seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2010: 4). Reflection from a psychodynamic perspective is not the same as cognitive activity 'it requires keeping an open mind… [and that] is a supremely emotional process' (Hollway, 2016:21). This was an important distinction for me. I did not wish to simply indulge myself in my own view of the world and allow my feelings to lead me towards certainties that did not reflect the complexities of what was observed (Hollway, 2016). Rather, though this writing, I could go beyond description and begin to articulate the unconscious fantasies that emerged for me in doing GT research.

Three fantasies mobilized by my experience of GT research

As a novice researcher, I embraced GT like an amateur cook following a renowned chef's recipe for a delicious stew. My belief was more attuned to the authority of the method, its guarantees of success and reliability, than on any certainty about the outcome of my research enterprise. Initially, I was not thinking about how to utilize GT, but rather of my own anxieties. It would only dawn on me slowly that my methods might have something to do with what I was feeling. Often, I simply wanted to drop the whole enterprise, to flee back to well-trod avenues of life experience where I remembered myself as competent. Gradually, I began to link my emotions to the inquiry in which I was engaged. In so doing, I began to see that my wish for GT as a rational research recipe was a defense against the anxieties mobilized in me by doing research.

The feelings associated with being a novice researcher promoted and sustained considerable defensive energy. As I became more familiar with researcher reflexivity (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009), I also became curious about how the architecture of failure I had constructed might help me to make sense of the emotional dynamics associated with my research project. As the 'primary instrument' (Pezalla, Pettigrew and Miller-Day, 2012: 183) in the research process, I embarked on a reflexive inquiry to uncover fantasies I had constructed to manage the anxieties of doing GT. Each of these fantasies is outlined in the following sections.

A fantasy of containment: the anxieties of being a novice

The emotional experience of trying to 'make sense' of data was at times overwhelming. I felt confused, ignorant, lacking in competence and, at a very simple level, blind to the richness contained in participant descriptions of their relationship with workplace disappointments. My anxieties were linked to this ever-present sense of confusion and my attempts to manage my anxieties were supported by a fantasy of *containment*. My confusion about the task of making sense of data as a novice GT researcher was managed through a fantasy about the infallibility of the method. If I relied on the GT method, and deployed it in the correct way then the confusion in the data would be manageable (the confusion was, of course, still there). The following extract captures some of this emotional confusion:

> *I've completed and transcribed five interviews at this point. I know the data are rich but there's such a lot of material here. I am reading and rereading Glaser's advice on working with the data. It seems straightforward enough so I'll be guided by the advice and start working on codes as my next phase. I'm worried in case I can't make sense of this material… and I feel a very long way away from coming up with anything that resembles 'theory'. I guess it's one foot in front of the other?*

Clues about a containment fantasy emerged in the initial written drafts about the project. The drafts were 'technically' correct, they adhered to the formal conventions of GT writing, but ultimately the wording was so opaque that it killed off the light of curiosity. Investing GT with infallibility protected me from the anxiety and uncertainties of being a novice GT researcher, from the damage that my inexperience might inflict on the research process. Awarding authority to the method helped me to manage uncomfortable feelings associated with my inexperience. Unfortunately, this meant that I also inadvertently constrained key features of the research process that I eventually found helpful – curiosity, ignorance and experimentation. In my illusory search for containment I developed an uncritical reliance on the GT method and language, investing them with implicit effectiveness, and loading them with responsibility for managing my fear of failure.

A fantasy of coherence: the anxieties of being overwhelmed

My anxiety was related to an uncontained mass of thought and observations; and moved through an initial stage of self-condemnation, ultimately resulting in incoherence. Around these feelings, I created a fantasy of *coherence*, that the GT method creates order from chaos. Having collected a large amount data, I was confronted with a dilemma: how would I know what I was looking for? This dilemma conflicted directly with adopting a rigorous approach to analysis to maintain theoretical control over what is emerging from the data (Glaser, 1998). While advocating that 'all is data', Glaser (2002) is quite specific about the steps involved in data analysis: coding, constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling and memoing. The purpose of these steps is to guide the researcher towards the inter-relationship between emergent concepts (Glaser, 1998). Unfortunately, despite constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling and memoing, no relationships seemed immediately apparent. The method offered me little help in the organization of my thinking. Psychodynamic theory provided conceptual elements corresponding

to emergent data. This cast important light upon my findings, but the pragmatic importation of an existing theoretical perspective to supplement gaps in GT was my first indication that I might be stepping outside of the orthodoxy. For example:

> *I'm drowning in data. I even had a dream last night in which I got into trouble swimming in the sea. Everyone I speak to has a story about disappointment. I've gone from loving talking about what I'm doing to hiding from it. I love Glaser's idea that everything is 'data' but I'm realizing that I don't know what I'm looking for or, more to the point, I'm not sure how to use the method to find what I am looking for. I don't want any more examples, or data, or thoughts, or feelings…*
>
> *Started coding interviews this week so it feels good to be busy and engaged with the data. But when is a code a code? Or a label? Or a category? I started out being confused with the data and now I'm confused with the method. Beginning to regret having chosen GT …I wonder if it's too late to change to some other method that might offer a bit more coherence? All I can think about now is whether or not I'll manage to eke out theory from this jumble of uncertainty. I'm exhausted feeling confused!*

My fantasy that GT would create order and coherence amongst chaotic data was illusory. The chaos still existed even though I acted as if order had been imposed. For example, I generated one hundred and fifty 'categories', which increased my confusion. The fantasy of coherence helped me to manage strong and disruptive feelings, which threatened at times to overwhelm me emotionally, thereby undermining my capacity to think. The methodological steps I had taken: importing aspects of another theory, hasty attention to coding, and debate about the coding process itself, were insufficient to dispel my apprehensions. I experienced myself as a disappointing researcher. I was also on to something. I had begun to blame the structure of my inquiry, GT itself.

A fantasy of purity: the anxieties of incompetence

The notion that there is an ideal form of method and a correct way to proceed arises from the orthodoxy that surrounds GT (particularly Glaser's version). This illusion of an ideal, intuited from GT's contested methodology, alerted me to a fantasy of *purity*. I feared that I would contaminate the research by deploying a version other than its purist form. I felt frustration, anger and guilt with myself and with GT. For example:

> *How is it possible at this stage in my life to feel so stupid? I never realized that this would be such a painful process…moving from some semblance of competence in the 'real' world to this feeling of utter incompetence in this new world of research. I feel as though I have to learn a new language (Russian for example) with which to communicate the most basic of concepts. I thought GT would be more dictionary/ map than 'rules of grammar'.*

I found it increasingly difficult to progress my theorizing. I felt lost in a roundabout without exit, and I came to relate more and more to a pure form of GT. Furthermore, because 'theory' is in the title of the method, 'theory' would surely result if only I could deploy GT in the appropriate manner. The circular feeling under this fantasy

boiled down to this: I had generated the idea of an ideal GT against which I blamed myself for shameful incompetence and at the same time, blamed the impurity of my own GT deployment. Every attempt to penetrate this fantasy deepened my sense of shame and blame. I gradually realized that multiple interpretative possibilities (e.g. psychodynamic theory) split the GT approach into (a) method and (b) an interpretive tool. This produced an important insight. My initial fantasy of a robust container for all types of data and analysis met the reality of a method open to multiple interpretations.

These fantasies are interesting!

I began to recognize that exposing the presence of fantasy constructions within my conception of GT allowed me both to contain anxiety and to think productively about my fantasies as contributions to theory building. My anxieties started to be transformed through a process of reflexive engagement with the lived experience of utilizing GT. Fantasies are always with us. They tend to occur in moments of anxiety. However, I could relate to them by surfacing their active presence as ongoing, internally generated obstacles to clear thinking. By naming them, I could clarify their function, maintain a position of curiosity in relation to their presence, and decode their relevance in relation to the method and subject of inquiry. My curiosity about fantasy allowed these stories to inform my thinking rather than obscure it completely.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our interest in the emotional dimensions of GT was stimulated by a gradual understanding of the similarity between the emotions expressed by research participants and the emotions evoked for the researcher by using the chosen method. This is not surprising because 'the (GT) method does not stand outside the research process; it resides within it' (Charmaz, 2008: 160). A key value in the method is that it is 'inductive, indeterminate and open-ended' (Charmaz, 2008: 156). What is surprising is that the method does not explicitly seek to make links with the emotional dynamics that are inevitably stimulated by such uncertainty. To start to address this issue, we suggest that there can be a parallel relationship between theory building and fantasy building. We have provided examples of three dimensions of fantasy that were integral to the experience of a novice researcher in the context of her research. These fantasies arose from anxieties about how to apply GT effectively, but the same anxieties informed insights about the method itself and about the theoretical dimensions generated within her study. In this final section of the paper we discuss some key points that have emerged from our experience to further clarify our contribution.

The fantasies emergent from anxiety in this study provided imaginative interpretations of the relationship between the researcher and the research; as well as supporting theory building on the theme of disappointment in organizations. We propose that emotions, fantasies and the processes surrounding their management are likely to be central to our own and others' experience of using GT and should be attended to as an integral element of the overall data. This is consistent with common procedures in GT research. For example, if the aim of utilizing the GT method is the production of 'rich descriptions' (Corbin and Strauss, 1990: 3) then their richness and depth can be enhanced by data that aligns with emotions and fantasies mobilized by

the researcher's investigation of a particular research context. It becomes possible therefore to identify patterns and variations of emotional resonances that inform and enrich the emerging themes of our research.

The fantasy work of the researcher is an important element in the production of creative hunches and ideas that can arise from using GT. We think that it is possible and desirable for researchers to become aware of the fantasies we generate, as well as their function and appropriateness within our research. Fantasy can have complex and competing roles in our studies, and function both defensively and creatively. It can mask potentially disruptive emotions, keeping them safely contained so that the research endeavour may continue. It also reflects emotional responses that, when brought to awareness, can deepen and enrich the theories we are seeking to generate from GT research. A key question therefore is, using unconscious emotions and fantasies generated by research, what should we be doing to be imaginative in our theory building?

Implications for practice

We have emphasised throughout this paper the importance of the 'researcher's subjectivity as an instrument of knowing' (Hollway, 2009:463) and we have also shown the value of unconscious fantasy as a powerful resource of research intelligence. This raises the question of how the researcher gives 'an authentic account' if so much 'is hidden from view' (Nicholls, 2017: 27)? How do researchers identify and work with unconscious processes in the service of theory building? We offer the following suggestions.

Keeping a dream journal is one way in which the 'unconscious embrace' (Hollway, 2013:170) of the research task can be identified. The dream narratives can be explored by questioning: why this dream, why now? We found that looking for associations between dreams and the research offered both an unsettling and a productive focus on researcher experience. In addition, dreams offer a method for uncovering our unconscious motives in ways that strengthen reflexivity because our experience is 'invariably complex, ambiguous, ambivalent' (Finlay, 2002:186). There are several helpful readings on how researchers can use dreams to inform research (Back, 2007; Nicholls, 2017; Ogden, 2004).

The supervisory relationship is one area in which the emotional dynamics of doing research can be explored as data. It can provide a holding space in which the unmentionable, unthinkable and unknowable are contained until such time as the researcher can inquire into and re-incorporate them as research data (French, 1997). We used the technique of *free association*, which creates an environment where it is possible for the researcher to speak her inner monologue about her experience of the research. For example, in this research about disappointment, this monologue was often associated with how the theme of the research was embedded in the researcher's own emotional and unconscious experience. In emphasizing free association within supervision, we are asserting that meaning lies not only in the manifest and latent content of what is said, but also in the unconscious thoughts that link one set of emerging ideas about the research to the next. Free association is helpful (alongside other ways of thinking and feeling) in noticing the fantasies connected with the

emerging nature of the analysis. It encourages unconscious feelings and motivations to surface, allowing for the same level of scrutiny as other data (Clarke, 2002).

The research journal is a commonly used reflexive tool in qualitative research. It provides a mechanism through which researchers can document the methodological decisions they make throughout their studies, track their analysis process, consider their own emotions and the roles they play in the process, document insights, and consider researcher bias (Orange, 2016). From a psychodynamic perspective journals provide an insight into the defended self. By this we mean that what we consciously document is only part of the story. Journals also provide an insight into what is excluded, hidden and not transparent to ourselves (Hollway, 2009).

Psychodynamic approaches are both an ontology and an epistemology (Deveroux, 1967). As an ontology, they 'emphasise the effects of affect, dynamic conflict, unconscious intersubjective processes and embodied practices' (Hollway, 2009: 464). From an epistemological perspective, psychodynamic perspectives deepen researcher subjectivity as 'an instrument of knowing' (Redman, 2016: 464). Psychodynamic perspectives therefore add an additional 'layer of interpretation, addressing unconscious communication and motivation' (Clarke, 2002:191). We believe that the tools we have outlined can help researchers to explore the unconscious and emotional dimensions of doing grounded theory in novel and interesting ways.

GT and beyond

For GT, our approach adds an example of how to capture data on the unconscious processes mobilized by researchers as their research unfolds, and between researchers and others as they interact. We argue that the fantasy work of the researcher is an important element in the process of analysis through which general assertions emerge that provide a basis for theory building. Researchers have much to learn about the complex emotional dynamics of using the GT method. We have interpreted Glaser's dictum that 'all is data' (Glaser, 2007), as an invitation to include *unconscious emotion*, masked by defenses, emergent in dreams, and formed into fantasies, that are intimately tied to the design, process and lived experience of the research.

A psychodynamic approach offers opportunities for researchers using grounded theory, and other inductive approaches to thematic analysis, to deepen their imaginative interpretations of the data by capturing elements of the unconscious dynamics that are part of being a researcher and of doing research. Our approach is important because it is not only about a researcher capturing emotions, but also about the ways in which emotion captures the researcher. In this sense, we are contributing to broader arguments about research as both personal involvement and professional distance. 'In telling her own story, a discerning scholar can build on her personal involvement to develop insights that can significantly contribute to and sharpen the analysis. But distance also needs to be upheld for such insights to emerge...' (Anteby, 2013: 1283). The emotional life of the researcher provides 'data points for insightful analysis' (Anteby, 2013: 1283). Unconscious emotions associated with the researcher's role and relations provide insights into the fantasies we create. These help us to delve inside at the same time as allowing us to step back from and analyse the emotional experience of our research.

Limitations and final thoughts

We are aware that there are limitations to our arguments and assertions within this paper. First, they are based on a single researcher's use of GT within her (doctoral) research. We cannot show that other researchers would generate similar (or indeed any) fantasies using the GT method, and this was not an aim of the paper. However, we have been encouraged, as these ideas developed and were publicly discussed at conferences and seminars, with the strong associations and similar experiences that were acknowledged by other researchers using both GT (not only novice researchers) and grounded approaches to qualitative analysis. Second, we do not imagine that our enthusiasm for a psychodynamic approach to researcher experience and practice is widely shared. We know from experience in research and scholarly writing that not everyone is interested in what is going on under the surface, or in the emotions associated with doing research. We are enthusiastic about our approach, but we are also aware that it can make theory building more complicated than it already is. Neither are we attempting to establish an orthodoxy of our own based on a psychodynamic perspective on GT. Our aim is relatively simple, we want to open the possibilities for emotional dimensions to GT and provide a coherent example to inspire future methodological work.

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